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SUBJECT: TIBETANS' SITUATION SUFFERABLE, BUT NOT
SUSTAINABLE - PART 3 OF A STATUS REPORT ON TIBETAN REFUGEES
IN INDIA

REF: NEW DELHI 01795 (A) NEW DELHI 02238 (B)

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Classified By: Political Officer Pushpinder Dhillon for Reasons 1.4 (B and D).

¶1. (C) Summary. During a series of visits to Tibetan settlements in six Indian states in May, June, and September, EmbOffs and visiting Refcoord learned that, overall, Tibetans fare better than other refugee populations in India, especially in the areas of primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, higher education and lucrative professional opportunities elude Tibetans as they face stiff competition - and some legal constraints - from Indian counterparts. Consequently, settlements are forced to depend upon agriculture, tourism, and crafts for their livelihood -- unpredictable sectors with limited income potential and limited desirability in the eyes of Tibetan youth. The precarious economic situation and seemingly limited opportunities have led some Tibetans in India to feel impatient with the Dalai Lama's "middle path." While rumbles of frustration with limited economic opportunities echoed throughout the settlements, every Tibetan reaffirmed support for His Holiness, but many also expressed hope that he would change strategy if the next round of PRC talks end with the same dismal results. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) This is the third cable in a three-part series assessing the Tibetan refugee situation in India. Kathmandu's Regional Refugee Coordinator, PRM/ANE Deputy Director, New Delhi PolOff, and Kolkata POL FSN visited New Delhi, Dharamsala, Uttaranchal, and remote Tibetan settlements in West Bengal, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. These reports distill over two weeks of meetings with the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), refugee reception centers, GOI and CTA administered schools, settlement officers, monastery officials, health workers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC), and GOI liaisons to the Tibetan settlements. This cable -- Part III -- examines the socio-economic status of Tibetan refugees in India and the most serious issues facing the settlements. This three-part series reflects collaboration between PRM, Embassy New Delhi, Consulate Kolkata, and Embassy Kathmandu.

All Settlements Not Created Equal

¶3. (U) Over 100,000 Tibetan refugees live on 40 settlements throughout India. The settlements visited by USG team vary

in population size (400-3,000 refugees), acreage (small urban plots to over 2,000 acres), organization, and access to resources. Settlements with large farming plots, such as Sonada in West Bengal and Miao in Arunachal Pradesh, allow the community to be self-sufficient and some have established a niche market for organic produce in neighboring communities. Other settlements, such as Kham Lingstang's metal works and Miao's carpet weaving, exist off the sale of Tibetan handicrafts. Many settlements cited the sale of sweaters during the winter months as their main source of revenue. Tibetan refugees purchase Indian-made sweaters at cost and disburse them throughout the subcontinent. Unfortunately, this income source is often unpredictable -- uncooperative weather or a slow tourism season can completely derail a settlement's estimated yearly income. Another problem is that, at best, these income sources offer relatively poor earning potential and have little appeal to modern Tibetan youth.

¶4. (SBU) The two most remote settlements in Arunachal Pradesh appeared to be the most prosperous, proving that settlement management, rather than mere proximity to Dharamsala or urban centers, can make a tangible difference. The Miao and Tezu settlements benefit from dynamic leaders who actively engage Dharamsala's attention through project proposals to the CTA and international donors. Tsewang Tashi Karleg, Miao's Settlement Officer, secured funding for solar power for the medical unit, 220 toilets, and a water storage tank. He also pioneered agreements with the state government to market Tibetan crafts. By contrast, the Tibetan population in Rumtek, Sikkim, which is not a formal settlement, suffers from a leadership void. Despite its proximity to the state capital, Rumtek's lack of organization has diminished tourist and handicraft opportunities, and its informal leadership has

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no working relationship with the CTA.

Still Some Way to Go on Women's Issues

¶5. (SBU) According to Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) President B. Tsering Yeshe, Tibetans lived until recently in a "gender neutral" society. Yeshe remarked that while Tibetans were largely satisfied with the status of women, international donors noticed that "gender neutral" translated into a lack of Tibetan women in leadership positions and pressured the CTA to make efforts to correct the situation. In response, the CTA stipulated that at least six of its 43 MPs must be women. Currently, ten women serve in parliament; however, their efforts to promote women's issues, such as child support, maternity leave, and domestic violence, have been uneven. Yeshe commented that this reluctance may be caused by the common view amongst Tibetan refugees that these issues detract from the "real" struggle, the one they are waging for a free Tibet. She said that the international community continues to be the driving force for improving conditions for women. Even in Miao, one of the more impressive settlements, the settlement officer confessed that the community has a "backward feeling," with regards to women's issues. The TWA chapter in Miao had participated in training activities in Dharamsala but had no activities of its own planned. In all the settlements, low retention rates for female students was a common theme in settlement schools, particularly in the higher grades and IT programs. In Dharamsala's Sherab Gatsel Lobling transit school, the advanced computer classes were exclusively male. The rector admitted that the few women who pursue the concentration quit after the basic course. Nevertheless, interlocutors in most settlements indicated that they are open to working with the USG on women's issues. TWA president Yeshe has launched several confidence-building and empowerment initiatives; however, it may take some time for such programs to impact settlements where the first concern is lack of employment opportunities at all levels.

Chinese Forced Sterilization?

¶6. (C) The Tibetan Refugee Reception Center in Dharamsala reported that newly arrived Tibetan women recounted cases of forced sterilization in China. They asserted that doctors inserted steel coils in utero after the women gave birth - without their knowledge or consent. The medical workers explained that usually Chinese authorities use copper coils, which are less prone to infection, but have substituted the cheaper steel version for Tibetans. Upon arrival in Dharamsala, one refugee suffered such a severe infection on account of the coil that doctors were forced to perform a hysterectomy. The medical unit retained the coil as evidence. Other refugees disclosed that the Chinese government provided incentives for Tibetan women who volunteer for the surgery. However, the Executive Director of the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre, a NGO trusted by the Tibetan community in India, dismissed the steel coil story as an exaggerated claim by the refugees. He argued that the Chinese usually excluded minorities from the one-child policy.

Education and the Aftermath

¶7. (U) On the whole, the education system for Tibetan refugees in India is impressive. The 81 Tibetan schools in India are divided into three groups depending on the school's administration -- the Central Tibetan Schools Administration, an autonomous body within the GOI's Ministry of Human Resources; the Sambhota Tibetan Schools Administration; and the Tibetan Children's Villages/Tibetan Homes Foundation. For primary and secondary education, the curriculum is fairly standardized with Tibetan being the language of instruction up to middle school, when English and Hindi are introduced. Many schools, such as Rajpur's Tibetan Homes Foundation, employ counselors to provide guidance to new arrivals from Tibet who reportedly suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome after separating from their parents and escaping to India. EmbOffs also visited the Ngoenga Tibetan School for special needs in Dehra Dun where 49 students are enrolled and cared for by 38 staff members.

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¶8. (U) After Tibetan students complete high school the situation becomes more challenging with stiff competition for entrance into Indian universities and insuperable financial barriers. The CTA Department of Education estimates that 1,300 Tibetan students currently pursue higher education in India. Other Tibetans - those who arrive in India later in life - have "aged-out" of the Indian education system. Many community leaders noted that these middle-aged lay Tibetans comprise the most vulnerable societal sector as they are often completely illiterate and unskilled, as well as lacking the family support that enables those who arrived earlier to manage. Newly arrived adults who are fortunate secure a seat in one of the transit schools to learn English and vocational training, such as tailoring and traditional Tibetan painting. The Tibetan SOS Vocational Training Center in Dehra Dun offers exceptional facilities and instruction for its 170 students. The eleven courses of study include computer applications, cookery, electronics and beautician training. Unfortunately, most transit schools are not as well-funded and suffer from over-crowding and insufficient resources, shelter, and medical care for the students.

¶9. (SBU) Tibetans complain that even if students graduate from university, India's competitive job market as well as institutional and legal barriers preclude refugees from securing good positions. Students with higher degrees are reluctant to return to the settlements and a seasonal job of selling sweaters; settlement elders sympathize with their ambitions. Consequently, every Tibetan with whom EmbOffs met support at least partial third-country resettlement to

provide more educational and professional opportunities for Tibetan youth. Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) President Tsewang Rigzin contended that education is the best "weapon" against China and that Tibetans need to look westward for these opportunities. Settlement officers in Dehra Dun added that increased remittances from youth employed in Europe and the US would be welcome.

Comment: Calls for Change in the Middle Path

¶10. (C) The limited professional opportunities available to Tibetan youth -- and to Tibetan refugees generally -- was acknowledged to be the most serious issue facing the settlements. Refugees agreed on this subject in all the settlements visited in northern India, from Dharamsala to Tezu. While Tibetans realize that they fare better than other refugee populations in India, they also acknowledge that their current situation is not a lasting solution. In private conversations, settlement officers reaffirmed their total loyalty to the Dalai Lama, but some confided the hope that he will reassess his strategy if the next round of talks with the PRC, scheduled for October, again yield dismal results. Other settlement officers expressed more interest in addressing the concerns of their communities through other means, such as expanding economic opportunities for Tibetans within India and in the West. End Comment.

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